

## SPRING BREAK IN MEXICO

Over 100,000 American teenagers and young adults travel to resort areas throughout Mexico over Spring Break each year. While the vast majority enjoy their vacations without incident, several may die, hundreds will be arrested and still more will make mistakes that could affect them for the rest of their lives. Using some common sense will help travelers avoid these unpleasant and dangerous situations.

While traveling in Mexico, American citizens are subject to Mexican law. An arrest or accident in Mexico can result in a difficult legal or medical situation, sometimes at great expense to the traveler. Mexican law can impose harsh penalties for violations that would be considered minor in the United States, and U.S. citizenship in no way exempts one from full prosecution under the Mexican criminal justice system. If U.S. citizens find themselves in legal trouble, they should contact the closest U.S. Consular Agency, U.S. Consulate, or the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City. (see "**Contact Information**" below). U.S. consular officials in Mexico can visit detained American citizens in prison, provide information about the Mexican legal system, and furnish a list of Mexican attorneys, among other assistance. U.S. Consular officials cannot arrange for Mexican officials to release arrested American citizens.

Excessive alcohol consumption and unruly or uncontrolled behavior can lead to serious problems with Mexican authorities. Alcohol is involved in the vast majority of arrests, accidents, violent crimes and deaths suffered by American students on Spring Break. Disturbing the peace, lewd or indecent behavior, littering, driving under the influence, drinking on the street or on public transportation, using public transportation without payment, or making obscene or insulting remarks are considered criminal activities by Mexican authorities. The importation, purchase, possession or use of drugs can incur severe penalties, including imprisonment without bail for up to a year before a case is tried, and imprisonment of several years following a conviction. All individuals 16 years of age or older are tried as adults.

Standards of security, safety and supervision may not reach those expected in the United States. This has contributed to deaths of U.S. citizens in automobile accidents, after falls from balconies, after falls into open ditches, by drowning in the ocean as well as in hotel pools, and in water-sports mishaps, among others.

Warning flags on beaches should be taken seriously. If black or red flags are up, do not enter the water. Do not swim in pools or at beaches without lifeguards. If you do, exercise extreme caution. Do not dive into unknown bodies of water, because hidden rocks or shallow depths can cause serious injury or death.

It is best not to carry even a pocket knife into Mexico as this can result in a weapons charge if a knife is found on a traveler who is arrested a separate charge, such as unruly behavior. Visitors driving across the border should ensure that their vehicles contain no firearms. Mexico imposes harsh penalties for bringing so much as one bullet across its borders.

If involved in a vehicle accident in which someone is injured, Mexican authorities usually put the driver in jail even though the accident may not have been his/her fault.

The following cities and areas are some of traditional destinations in Mexico for travelers on Spring Break. While other resort areas may not be as well-known for this type of travel, the advice contained here still applies:

**Cancun and Cozumel:** Cancun is a fairly large city, approaching 500,000 inhabitants, with increasing reports of crime. Crimes against the person, such as rape, commonly but not exclusively occur at night or in the early morning hours, and often involve alcohol and the discotheque environment. Therefore, it is important for travelers to be aware of their surroundings and to take general precautions. To protect against property crimes, valuables should be left in a safe place or not brought at all. If you are a victim of a crime, immediately notify the U.S. Consular Agency in Cancun or the U.S. Consulate in Merida at the telephone numbers provided below.

If you rent a moped or other vehicle in Cancun, it is advisable to purchase the third party insurance, as the insurance offered on some credit cards will not cover you in Mexico. Should you have an accident or cause damage to the moped, you may be required to pay the full amount of any repairs, in cash, as determined by the rental agency, or face arrest.

Due to an ongoing budgetary crisis, a number of Cancun municipal employees, most notably police and fire fighters, have been on strike since August 2004. There have been some reports of local police officers

extorting tourists in the hotel district. Federal law enforcement agents have been sent to Cancun to help ensure that basic law enforcement functions are carried out, but visitors should exercise extra caution until the dispute is resolved and public safety services return to normal.

In Cancun, there is often a very strong undertow along the beach from the Hyatt Regency all the way south to the Sol y Mar. Several drownings and near-drownings have been reported on the east coast of Cozumel, particularly in the Playa San Martin-Chen Rio area.

**Acapulco:** Avoid swimming outside the bay area. Several American citizens have died while swimming in rough surf at the Revolcadero Beach near Acapulco.

**Cabo San Lucas:** Beaches on the Pacific side of the Baja California Peninsula at Cabo San Lucas are dangerous due to rip tides and rogue waves; hazardous beaches in this area are clearly marked in English and Spanish.

The Department of State has received reports of equipment rental operators using local colleagues to generate a “mob” to intimidate customers into paying exorbitant amounts for damage to rented equipment.

**Matamoros/South Padre Island:** The Mexican border cities of Matamoros and Nuevo Progreso are located 30 to 45 minutes south of the major Spring Break destination of South Padre Island, Texas. Travelers to the Mexican border should be especially aware of safety and security concerns due to increased violence in recent months between rival drug trafficking gangs competing for control of narcotics smuggling routes. While it is unlikely that American visitors would get caught up in this violence, travelers should exercise common-sense precautions such as visiting only the well-traveled business and tourism areas of border towns during daylight and early-evening hours.

**Tijuana:** Tijuana has one of the busiest land border crossings in the world. The beach towns of Rosarito and Ensenada also attract a large number of tourists. Drinking alcoholic beverages excessively in a public street is prohibited.

Tijuana boasts a large number of pharmacies; to buy any controlled

medication, a prescription from a Mexican doctor is needed. The prescription must have a seal and serial number. Under no other circumstances should an individual purchase prescription medicines. Possession of controlled medications without a Mexican doctor's prescription is a serious crime and can lead to arrest.

**Additional Information:**

Travelers going to Mexico over Spring Break should refer to the Department of State's Consular Information Sheet for Mexico (<http://www.travel.state.gov/mexico.html>), and the publication *Tips for Student Travelers* (<http://www.travel.state.gov/studentinfo.html>), and the publication *Assistance for Victims of Crime* ([http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies\\_1748.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1748.html)). The U.S. Embassy Internet address is: <http://www.usembassy-mexico.gov>.

**Contact Information:**

In case of a serious emergency, travelers should immediately contact the closest U.S. Consular Agency, U.S. Consulate, or the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City. Contact information is available here:  
[http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_970.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_970.html)

DRAFT:CA/OCS/ACS/WHA:RAHaldane

CLEAR:Embassy Mexico:RMBishop(ok)

CA/OCS/ACS/WHA:KCDavison(ok)

CA/OCS/ACS:CDWood(ok)

CA/OCS:ACMoore(ok)

CA:CBarry(ok)

WHA/MEX:SBRoyster(ok)

DS/DSS/ITA:CRKollmar(ok)